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**OPEN LETTER CLUB  
RECORDS  
1886-1967**

*Processed by:*

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Archival Technical Services

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Xeroxed copies of the papers of the Open Letter Club, a national organization dealing with the race problem, were obtained by the Manuscript Section of the Tennessee State Library and Archives from Mrs. Essie W. Samuels of Nashville, Tennessee, who collected them from various places while doing research for her thesis, "A History of Failure: The Open Letter Club."

The materials in this collection measure .42 linear feet. There are no restrictions on the materials. Single photocopies of unpublished writings in the Open Letter Club Papers may be made for purposes of scholarly research.

## SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Open Letter Club Papers, 1886-1967, consisting of one volume and about sixty items, are composed of correspondence, membership lists, papers by members on such subjects as education and the suppression of Negroes, a newspaper clipping, and a thesis.

The thesis, titled "A History of Failure: The Open Letter Club," was submitted by Essie (Wenar) Samuels in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in History at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee in August 1967. In her preface she states that the Open Letter Club was, "...a loosely organized attempt to disseminate liberal propaganda concerning civil rights and education for the Negro in the South between 1887 and 1890. William Malone Baskervill professor of English literature at Vanderbilt University, and George Washington Cable, prominent author and lecturer, were the self-appointed leaders of this endeavor." In chapter 1, Mrs. Samuels gives a short biographical sketch of both Cable and Baskervill, and a short history of Vanderbilt University. In chapter 2, she gives the organization of the club, defines its purposes, and relates its history. In chapter 3, she relates the "substance and essence" of its failure.

Included in the correspondence is a letter from William Malone Baskervill to George Washington Cable, dated January 8, 1890, in which he tells of the repercussions in Nashville brought about by Cable's "breaking bread" with the Napiers. He writes Cable that he believes he made a mistake in so doing because, "the bug bear used to frighten the southerners is social equality." He continues, saying, "my opinion in regard to the Negro question is that it is difficult enough in itself and that we must not handicap it with social equality or with any actions that can be so construed."

There is a letter from Charles Waddell Chesnutt to Baskervill, dated June 11, 1889, refuting a Mr. Bidwell's argument that the Negro race is inferior to the White race.

Included with the correspondence are resumes of the contents of ten letters of Baskervill to Cable (July 13, 1886-July 16, 1888) and a resume of one letter (February 19, 1889) from M.E. Strieby to Cable. These letters concerned Nashville, politics, Cable's writings and invitation to him to give annual Literary address at Vanderbilt University in 1887, Vanderbilt University, and the reaction of the people to Cable when he visited Nashville.

There is a copy of a newspaper article from the *Christian Advocate*, about 1890, paying tribute to Cable as an author but decrying his association in Nashville with the Negroes.

Membership lists include list of members of the Open Letter Club and also lists of whites and Negroes who wanted a copy of Dr. Haygood's reply to Senator Eustis's paper on race antagonism and a copy of the symposium on the above subject.

Included are six opinions, in summary, from correspondence originating from the Open Letter Club's pamphlet symposium, "Shall the Negro be Educated or Suppressed?" These are opinions of the following men: the Reverend John H. Boyd, Charles W. Chesnutt, Charles Forster Smith, William M. Baskervill, ex-governor Chamberlain, and the Honorable John Clegg.

## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

### **William Malone Baskervill**

- |      |   |
|------|---|
| 1850 | April – Born in Fayette County, Tennessee; happy young farm life on parents' farm   |
| 1874 | Went to Leipzig, Germany to study at the University   |
| 1876 | Taught Latin at Wofford College, South Carolina; married Florence Adams of Amherst County, South Carolina   |
| 1878 | They returned to Leipzig; wife died at birth of son   |
| 1881 | Returned to U.S. to teach German and to assist in teaching English at Vanderbilt University; later, returned to Leipzig and returned to Vanderbilt to be a professor of English |
|      | Married the daughter of Bishop Holland N. McTyeire  |
| 1888 | President, Vanderbilt Athletic Association  |
| 1900 | Died  |

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

### George Washington Cable

1845	October 12 – Born in New Orleans, Louisiana
1861	Enlisted in the 4 <sup>th</sup> Mississippi Cavalry
1869	December 7 – Married Louise Burling Stewart
1870	Wrote column for the New Orleans <i>Picayune</i> under the name “Drop Shot”
1873	Had first story published in <i>Scribner’s Monthly</i>
1879	Published his book, <i>Old Creole Days</i> – recognized as a classic
1882	Received an honorary degree of Doctor of Letters from Washington and Lee College
1885	Published <i>The Silent South</i> which aroused resentment in the South
	Moved to Northampton, Mass., where he made his home
1925	Died

## CONTAINER LIST

### **Box 1**

1. Clipping
2. Correspondence – Baskervill, William Malone
3. Correspondence – Cable, George Washington
4. Correspondence – Chesnutt, Charles Waddell
5. Correspondence – Moffat, M.W.
6. Correspondence – Strieby, M.E.
7. Membership Lists
8. Opinions on “Shall the Negro Be Educated or Suppressed?”
9. Resumes of correspondence
10. Thesis – “A History of Failure: The Open Letter Club” – Essie W. Samuels

## NAME INDEX

This is a name index of the correspondence in the Open Letter Club Papers, along with the dates of the letters and information regarding their contents. The figures in parentheses immediately following the name denote the number of letters, if more than one. The last number refers to the folder in which the material is to be found.

Baskervill, William Malone (7), 1888-1890, re: a monthly paper; pamphlets to distribute; Cable's "breaking bread" with the Napiers and resultant denunciation in the Nashville papers; the Democratic party and the good of the States, 2

Cable, George Washington (5), 1889, re: publishing a paper on the Negro question success of circular for the Open Letter Club; Chamberlain's memo; Open Letter Club action; and higher education for Negroes, 3

Chesnutt, Charles Waddell, 1889, re: refuting Bidwell's views on the Southern question, 4

Moffat, M.A., 1891, re: items that can be used in the propaganda that are a-political, 5

Strieby, M.E., 1889, re: distribution of Dr. Haygood's comments on Eustis's paper in the *Forum*, 6